

SITUATION REPORT NO. 2
INCIDENT NO. 2000-080
DATE: August 31, 2000 TIME: 2:00 p.m.

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer
State Capitol
Bismarck, N.D. 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Western North Dakota Wildfires – Dry lightning that accompanied storms on August 26 caused a series of wildfires throughout the Little Missouri National Grasslands and the Badlands.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: Two firefighters were slightly injured on Sunday while working in rough country in the Badlands. Billings County officials reported that both were treated on scene. On Wednesday, several crew members were treated for minor burns and blisters.
3. DAMAGES: Since August 26, 25 fires in Billings County had burned approximately 6,100 acres. According to reports from the Billings County Emergency Manager, a baler started the initial fire, and within hours, lightning had ignited other fires. Fires destroyed 600 round hay bales during the first day. Farm equipment and mature trees around a farm were also destroyed. The longest of these fires is the Blacktail Fire, which has been burning mostly in the rough breaks of the Badlands. An entire fence line, measuring approximately one-mile long, was burned. None of the oil well sites within the burn area was harmed.

As of August 31, firefighters are still working two fires, one in the Blacktail area of the Little Missouri National Grasslands and the other in the Painted Canyon of the Badlands. Updates on these fires are as follows:

Blacktail Fire: Cooler temperatures and higher humidities are helping firefighters make progress battling this blaze. A National Interagency Fire Center (NFIC) report places acres burned at 5,770 and containment at 80 percent. Approximately one-half of the Billings County's firefighting crew was released Wednesday evening. Local resources on scene today include up to 35 firefighters, two grass units, a pumper and support water trucks. The U.S. Forest Service has 100 personnel assigned to the fire, including: a 20-person hand crew from the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana; eight engine crews; one initial attack module; and two squads from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation. The National Park Service has provided overhead staff and three engine crews. Local and federal crews will monitor and dig out hot spots today, perform mopup and refine mapping of the perimeter of the burns. On Wednesday, heat detectors were used to find hot spots, which were marked for hand work and water drops. The main focus was securing the perimeter and putting out hot spots.

Painted Canyon Fire: Park Service officials expect to have this fire under control by September 1. The fire, which burned 450 acres, was contained two days ago and is now on patrol status by National Park Service staff.

Fires in other Counties:

Adams: Fires destroyed approximately 300 to 400 acres of small grain crops and up to 400 acres of pastureland. Fires also damaged hay bales, but the tonnage destroyed is unknown.

Golden Valley: A grass fire southeast of Trotters burned approximately 100 acres. The fire started the evening of August 28. No buildings or people were endangered. Area ranchers assisted firefighters in efforts to control the fire. Other agencies providing support included the Golden Valley County Sheriff's Office and County Emergency Management.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: No change from the previous report.

STATE: No change from the previous report.

FEDERAL: No change from the previous report.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: Billings County area ranchers have provided donations to firefighters, including leather gloves for workers. Local residents continue to provide hot dishes and sandwiches. A hot meal was catered to firefighters on Tuesday. The U.S. Forest Service provided 37 sack lunches on Tuesday and 50 sack lunches on Wednesday, as well as 40 cases of water and Power Aid.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: Governor Ed Schafer signed an executive order and a proclamation on August 29 declaring a fire emergency for the state of North Dakota due to dangerous fire conditions in western part of the state. The declaration calls for implementation of fire prevention strategies, including mandatory restrictions and/or prohibitions on open burning, off-road motorized travel, smoking, fireworks and equipment operations if the National Weather Service fire index statements indicate danger categories of "very high" or "extreme."

North Dakota Emergency Management has posted the North Dakota Rural Fire Danger Guide on its web page: <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>. This guide lists restrictions as they relate to the fire danger indexes.

A U.S. Forest Service emergency medical technician (EMT) has been on-scene to treat injured firefighters. A Quick Response Operations Support trailer is serving as a command post and feeding site.

The Adams County Commission has issued an emergency declaration because of extremely hot and dry conditions.

Slope County Commissioners passed a “no burning” resolution on August 29.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: Federal, state and local organizations are providing fire awareness and education information at this time.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No change from the previous report.
9. OTHER: Situation Reports published by North Dakota Emergency Management are posted on the Division’s Internet home page. The address is:
<http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director